



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

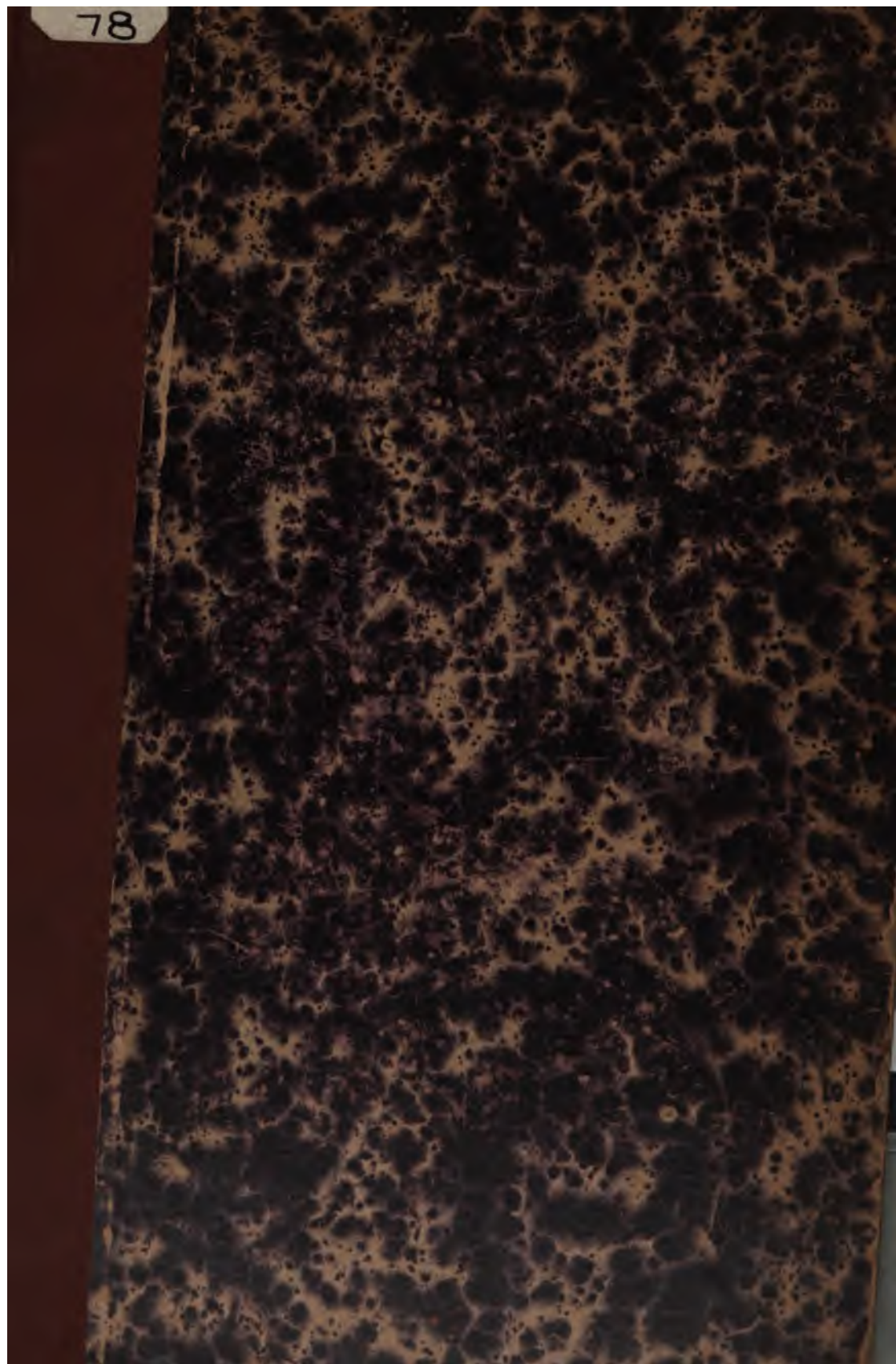
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



28118.78



By Mail.

13 June, 1878.

HARVARD
COLLEGE
LIBRARY.

THE *Am.*
LAST CENTURY
OF
CONGREGATIONALISM;
OR,
The Influence on Church and State
OF THE
FAITH AND POLITY OF THE PILGRIM FATHERS.

By REV. WILLIAM W. PATTON, D. D.

REPRINTED FROM THE NEW ENGLANDER FOR OCTOBER, 1876.

WASHINGTON, D. C.:
W. M. STUART, PRINTER,
1878.

C 8118 78

1878. June 13
By mail

THE
Last Century of Congregationalism.

The present year is fruitful in historical studies; and it becomes those who to-day represent the Pilgrim faith and polity, to estimate afresh their value, as the traces of their power shall be found in the events of the century just closed.

At the birth of our nation, in 1776—a little over a century and a half from the landing of the Pilgrims—it is supposed that the Congregational Churches numbered about seven hundred, with not quite so large a number of ministers. No statistics exist of the communicants, but they could scarcely have averaged over one hundred to a church, making seventy thousand in all. It is a simple thing to turn to the carefully prepared statistical tables of the *Congregational Quarterly*, and ascertain our present strength, which is as follows: Churches, 3,438; ministers, 3,300; membership, 338,313. This indicates an increase of not quite five-fold. The increase is moderate, at best, while it falls far behind that of other denominations which have been running the race at our side. It will do us good to study a little into this phenomenon.

Taking things, first, in the aggregate form, we find that while, during the century, the Congregational Churches increased five-fold, the population of the country increased eleven-fold; so that, from this general point of view, we have come short, by more than one-half, of relatively holding our own—supposing religion as a whole to have exhibited no gain in its relation to the population. But the churches of all kinds in the land have multiplied, during the century, from about 1950, in a population of three millions and a half, to 72,000, in a population of

thirty-eight millions; or from one church to every souls, to a church for every 529 souls. This is an aggregate advance of thirty-seven-fold, or more than seven times the ratio of increase of the Congregational Churches as compared with other denominations. The fact is, whereas, a hundred years since the Congregational Churches were the leading religious body of the country, they now rank as the seventh on the list, being surpassed by the Methodists, Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Roman Catholics, Campbellites, and the Lutherans. With this result, as stated in the January number of the *North American Review*, it contrasts the confident prediction of Rev. Dr. Stiles, President of Yale College, in his famous sermon before the Legislature of Connecticut, in 1783, in which, speaking of the Future Glory of the United States," he said, "that if we look forward and see this country increased to fifty millions, while we see all the religious sects increasing into respectable bodies, we shall doubtless find the body of the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches making an equal figure with any two of them!" The would-be prophetic President further said of our Methodist brethren, who had then just begun to be heard of in this country: "There are Wesleyans, Mennonists and others, all of which will make a very inconsiderable amount in comparison with those who will give the religious complexion to America." Alas! if one must not boast of the morrow, because he knows not what a day may bring, why did not the good President think how unsafe to boast of a century! Those to be "inconsiderable" Wesleyans, who had planted their first church in 1606, have had the presumption to grow, during the interval of a hundred years (including all branches of Methodism), from almost nothing, that is, from about eighty churches and preachers, at the time of this prophesy, to 20,453 churches in charge, with 3,173,229 members. Even if we a

President Stiles did, the Presbyterian force to our own, we shall muster less than one-third of the Methodist number, instead of being, as he anticipated, equal to any two of the larger denominations ! During this same period the Episcopalians have grown from about 300 parishes to nearly 2,800, or about nine-fold ; the Presbyterians from about 300 churches to 5,000, or nearly seventeen-fold, and the Baptists (of all sorts) from about 350 churches to 24,794 with 2,036,719 members, or about seventy-fold. Judged, then, from the relative increase of churches during the century just closed, the five Protestant denominations with which we are chiefly familiar stand thus in rank of comparative growth : Methodists, three hundred and fifty-fold ; Baptists, seventy-fold ; Presbyterians, seventeen-fold ; Episcopalians, nine-fold ; and Congregationalists, five-fold. There is, indeed, a certain unfairness to an old and large denomination, in this kind of comparison ; because a new and small body can always for a time more rapidly double or triple or quadruple its limited number. A sect which should, to-day, have but two churches in all the land, might have four next year, and thus might boast of an increase of one hundred per cent. in a single year, while the strongest denomination in the country might only show an addition to its previous number of five per cent. The wonderful growth of the Methodists and Baptists appears not merely in manifolding their numbers, as these were at the beginning of the century, but in the huge aggregate which they exhibit.

This statement is not flattering to our denominational pride, especially when it is considered that we started with an uncommon *prestige*, arising from the fact that our numbers were then equal to those of any two other denominations ; that historically we represented the spiritual faith and democratic polity of the Pilgrims ; that we possessed learning and wealth ; and that our ministers and members had the full confidence of the American people, from the patriotic course which they had pursued during

the War of the Revolution. Surely it becomes us to study carefully the causes which have limited our growth. These have been numerous, and are worthy of particular mention, as showing our errors and misfortunes, and as enabling us to judge how far we have gained in the wisdom of our methods, and in the hopefulness of our circumstances, during the last quarter of the century.

1. A certain limitation grew out of our geographical position. The churches were in New England, at the northeastern corner of the land; and of that section they had principal possession. This was a great advantage for local development, but was less favorable to extension into other sections of the country. Had our churches been evenly distributed among the original colonies, or through New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland, in addition to New England, they would have operated more uniformly upon the general population of the country. As it was, the new regions into which the population flowed were adjacent, not to them, but to the Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, Lutherans, and others, who were already in occupation of those States, and who needed only to extend, as the contiguous inhabited area widened, their existing ecclesiastical organizations; while the Congregationalists must needs leap over old territory possessed by the other denominations, and seek to plant churches of a different order on the new ground which those brethren were naturally seeking to cover. This was somewhat like an army losing a continuous line of connection with its permanent base of supplies, and in days when distance meant so much more than it now does.

2. A moral fact operated as another geographical limitation, to wit, the anti-slavery sentiment of the churches. New England was ever the deadly antagonist of slavery, which had only a nominal existence within her borders. Her sons, partly for this reason, emigrated almost wholly to the West, and only a few merchants and professional men took up a residence at the South, in the large cities.

But two or three Congregational Churches existed, at the close of the Revolution, in the whole South, and these soon ceased all communication with the sister churches at the North, and affiliated with the Presbyterians. Indeed, a consistently worked Congregational Church is incompatible with the practical operation of slavery. For, in such a church, the members are on an equality, and the discipline is by vote of the entire body. Imagine, now, a church composed indiscriminately of masters and slaves, in which each master was liable to have complaint entered against him by any slave whom he might maltreat, and whose case must be judged by the assembled membership, the majority of which was likely to be composed of bondmen jealous of their Christian rights! How long would the masters favor such a church polity? Again, how could the free polity operate with a large part of the membership owned by a few leading men, without whose permission, under the existing State laws, no meetings could be held, and no individual slave member could leave his plantation, and by whom each troublesome communicant could be soundly flogged, on his return from a church meeting, or could be sold to distant parts! Nothing else need be said to show how necessarily a genuine Congregationalism was excluded from the South, that is, from one-half of the country. Our principles were seditious, under Southern laws, and no attempts were made to extend our denominational fellowship into the slave States. Yet those are the States where Methodism finds, because of its former complicity with slavery, a million and a quarter of members, and five thousand ministers. Since the abolition of slavery, it has been found difficult to introduce an entirely new denomination on the pre-occupied ground. If, now, it be asked how we account for the vast number of the Baptists at the South, seeing that their polity is also Congregational, the answer is, that they never carried out the polity in the presence of slavery. The writer consulted a leading Baptist minister and editor on this point,

stating the natural antagonism of a democratic church polity to the practical operation of slavery, and inquiring what the Baptist experience had been. He replied, that slavery had compelled the sacrifice of this democratic autocracy; that, as far as possible, black Baptists had been organized into separate churches from the whites, thus evading the application of the polity to mixed classes; and that where this was impossible, the whites became an aristocracy in the church, and wholly controlled it, treating the black membership as a cipher. Thus the spread of the Baptists in the South was due to the intense denominational zeal produced by their peculiar views of Baptism, to their doctrine and practice of close communion, which forbade their merging into other communions, and to their virtual refusal to carry out the fundamental principles of the polity common to them and us. We have no regrets to express over our failure, in such circumstances, to show a representation among the various sects of Southern Christianity.

3. Another serious and almost fatal limitation was the lack, for a long period, of the organization necessary to a propagation of our church polity. One reading the ecclesiastical platforms of our fathers, and studying their methods, is struck with their provincialism. They were devised for a narrow home use. They were adapted to a homogeneous population in a small district of country. They do not seem to contemplate aggressive action, wide development, national boundaries. No provision is made for union of resources, and a reasonable singleness of direction. The fear was of every approach to centralization; the whole weight was thrown in favor of an independency tempered with local advisory councils. There was much opposition, at first, to ministerial district associations, and State associations were of a still later date. These latter acted also as missionary societies for the churches of their respective States, to aid the work in the new settlements. How even this instrumentality was de-

nominationally neutralized will be seen under another head. But no provision existed for cultivating a sense of unity; for perfecting the fellowship of all the churches; for combining, under suitable direction, the financial resources and the personal labors which New England could have brought to bear with immense power upon the other sections of our land. One-half of the century had elapsed before the organization of the American Home Missionary Society, and even that was not denominational. Meanwhile the rival church polities had the unspeakable advantage of a complete organization for aggressive movement, under unity of management, and with a watchful vigilance which embraced every opening. We have illustrated, afresh, the weakness which has ever beset a democracy in the presence of centralized systems. Our fathers, in properly avoiding organized power, failed to provide suitably for organized fellowship and labor. They left largely to local zeal and individual enterprise what should have sprung from the systematic supervision of the ablest minds. Nor was the minuter arrangement for local work any more complete. Too little use was made of itinerant methods of labor, and the system was not adjusted sufficiently to utilize the small beginnings of interest in new places, so as to employ lay preaching and form a class meeting, where there might not be opportunity yet for a church, with its settled pastor. This lack of necessary machinery, both large and small, will go far to account for the short-comings of our success. Candor requires us to confess that our system, as bequeathed to us by the early fathers of New England, was poorly equipped for anything beyond parish-work in that section of the land; and that we owe it to the pressure of necessity and the enlightening example of other denominations that, in recent times, we have discovered methods of religious co-operation and organized fellowship for the churches of our order, harmonious with Congregational principles.

4. Another check upon growth came from the undue subordination of polity to the maintenance of a single form of doctrine—the Calvinistic. The early Congregationalists were nursed amid, if not upon, doctrinal controversies. John Robinson took part, in Holland, in the opposition to Arminianism, and the events of the times threw the churches into sympathy with the Reformed Dutch and the Presbyterian bodies, which shared their antagonism to Episcopacy. Hence there arose a disposition to consider Calvinism the main thing to be conserved and propagated, and to underestimate the importance of a scriptural church polity. This tended to make an easy passage for our members into churches of other Calvinistic denominations, when local convenience or social and business considerations tempted. The common remark was: "The denominations are almost the same; they agree in doctrine; the *only* difference is in church government." This was the alluring statement of our Presbyterian brethren, as they opened wide their door to receive the New Englander who had come into their vicinity; and that New Englander had been taught the same theory before he left home. His liberal-minded pastor had always represented the Presbyterians and Congregationalists as virtually one, even if he had not gone a little further, and said that, west of the Hudson, Presbyterianism was preferable. If that emigrant Congregationalist had lived in Connecticut, he had also been accustomed to a system of Consociationism, which could scarcely be distinguished from Presbyterianism, and probably had heard the local church to which he belonged popularly called "Presbyterian," according to the custom which, until within a few years, prevailed in that State. If a young man went to either of the two theological seminaries which for years trained our ministers, the one at Andover or that at New Haven, he was taught that, so long as he could find Calvinistic fellowship, it was of no consequence whether he remained a Congregationalist or not. In-

deed, he was openly advised to become a Presbyterian, in case he settled at the West. Prof. Moses Stuart stated, in 1829, in replying to strictures upon the American Education Society, that to his "certain knowledge," the directors of that Society in and about Boston were accustomed to recommend "all young men who go from New England into the boundaries of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, to unite with the Presbyteries, and not to hold on upon Congregationalism;" and that "nearly one-half of the young men who have gone from the Andover Theological Seminary have become Presbyterians." (See Baird's *History of the New School*, p. 333.) Those who did not take that advice, but established Congregational churches, were often viewed with suspicion by their own brethren at home, as well as by the Presbyterians into whose neighborhood they came, as probably loose in doctrine or disorderly in practice, and therefore unwilling to come under the supervision of Presbytery. Thus, attachment to the peculiarities of the Westminster Assembly's Confession of Faith was made completely to override the Pilgrim polity, which was the revival of the New Testament democracy. There was a noble side to this mistaken course. It proved how ready our fathers were to insist on spiritual truth rather than on outward form, and that they were prepared to sacrifice sect to general Christian interests. But in so doing it had been well not simply to have exchanged one sect for another; and also to have studied history, so as to have learned how intimately connected errors of polity have been with errors of doctrine, in all ages; that Romanism, for example, was, enabled by its usurped ecclesiastical power, first to introduce doctrinal corruption, and then to prevent a return to orthodoxy. It would also have been wise to consider, that theological truth may be held in better spirit, and may be more freely and wisely developed and formulated, under one ecclesiastical system than under another. The choicest wine may sometimes catch a dam-

aging flavor from the cask which contains it. Who can tell what would have been the fortunate result, if the exactly contrary policy had been pursued? If our fathers had had the wisdom and grace to say, that the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism should make no breach of ecclesiastical fellowship, but that the broad and scriptural Congregational communion should embrace all churches and ministers who loved Christ as their atoning Savior, and who were willing to respect one another's liberties? Blessed be God, that now we have reached a position, where we cling to our New Testament polity, and accept a simply evangelical creed!

5. A very great limitation upon our denominational growth was occasioned by the adoption, in 1801, of a systematic plan of union with the Presbyterians in the regions west of New England. The occasion of this was, a wise and noble desire to provide for the religious wants of the new settlements. From the overestimate of mere doctrinal agreement, just noticed, the plan agreed upon was such as to favor, in its practical working, the growth of Presbyterianism. "The Presbyterian tendencies of the ministers of Connecticut were the originating cause of this plan," says Dr. J. H. Baird, in his *History of the New School*, p. 154. They did not take very great precaution to perpetuate Congregational principles. For, while under the conceptions which then prevailed, the mass of emigrating Congregational ministers and members were almost certain to go into the Presbyterian Church, as the wise and fitting thing, it was arranged that where Congregational Churches were nevertheless formed, they might, if they pleased, have a connection with the neighboring Presbytery, under Presbyterian pastors; might send committeemen to sit in its meetings, as if ruling elders; might be entered on its roll, as under its care; and might form part of its basis of representation in the General Assembly. By this process the pastors, who were full-fledged members of the Presbytery, were

tempted to mould over the churches; the leading members, who appeared as *quasi* elders, were inoculated with the virus of the system; and the churches, though still managing their internal affairs by vote of the communicants (except in certain cases of discipline,) were familiarized with the name Presbyterian, as in some sort applicable to themselves. As there was no ecclesiastical method then existing for keeping up a denominational fellowship with New England, they came more and more, every year, under the influence of those who were so ready to welcome them into a kindred denomination. The ministers found it useless to maintain Associations in addition to Presbyteries; while the churches, one by one, came largely and naturally to the conclusion, that they might as well be Presbyterian in name and form, seeing that they were so intimately connected with the system. Under this plan a Presbyterian minister settled over a Congregational church was not required to leave the Presbytery and join the Association; while it was insisted, that every Congregational minister settled over a Presbyterian church should join the Presbytery and come under its power. Ministers and churches were thus lost, by scores and hundreds, while rarely, if ever, did a minister or church (until the anti-slavery agitation and the divisions in the Presbyterian body furnished new motives) change polity in the opposite direction. Rev. Dr. Fisher, in the General Assembly of 1835, candidly said, that "the Congregationalists from New England, being active and enterprising in the western country, the General Assembly had invited them to throw in their strength to build up and enlarge the Presbyteries in that region." (Baird's *New School*, p. 443.)

With this union policy our Home Missions were made to harmonize. The contributions of Congregationalists were placed in the same treasury with those of New School Presbyterians, and were disbursed without reference to the denominational character of the churches

aided. The result was, to speak in general terms, that the Congregationalists supplied two-thirds of the funds, and the Presbyterians furnished two-thirds of the beneficiary churches! Alas, what could a polity be expected to accomplish, whose resources were largely spent in building up a rival system, whose ministers were actually taught, in its own seminaries, to desert it, and whose members left it, with their old homes, when they migrated elsewhere! Mitchell, in his *Guide to Principles*, etc., remarks: "It is computed that 400 churches, or more, have been gathered in the West, for the Presbyterian Church, by the benevolence of Connecticut alone; and I have seen it stated, by high Presbyterian authority, that not less than 1,500 of their churches are essentially Congregational in their origin and habits." Thirty years ago Mr. Punchard wrote: "Our denomination has contributed largely of money and of mind to erect and sustain churches at the West, yet scarce one in fifty of these is upon the Congregational platform." Our practice has largely changed since these brethren bore their sad testimony; but there can be no question as to the accuracy of their statements. Indeed, one need only to inquire into the ecclesiastical origin of the members and ministers of the Presbyterian churches in the West, and into the early history of a large portion of those in the State of New York, to be satisfied that, had no plan of union been adopted, and had the Congregationalists, on leaving their early home, adhered to their own polity, our numbers would now have been twice or thrice what they are, and the empire States of the Interior would have been a second New England in their ecclesiastical character.

6. Congregationalism has suffered another important limitation from a direct effect of the doctrinal peculiarities of its former history. The early ministers were strong Calvinists, of the type now known as Old School. They held ideas of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, of human inability to all good, of sovereign per-

sonal election and reprobation, of atonement for the elect alone, of the nature of the influence of the Holy Spirit, and of the entire passivity of the sinner in the new birth, which now are seldom preached among us, and are held by few if any of our theologians, even such as style themselves Calvinists. There was little in the preaching of such doctrines to promote revivals of religion, or to secure individual conversions—though the grace of God did secure these results from the accompanying gospel truth. There was much in them to provoke controversy and to secure reaction toward some antagonistic system, which, in the swing to the opposite extreme, was likely to be unevangelical. And such was the result. Rigid Calvinism caused a revulsion, which first took form as a cold unevangelical Arminianism, very different from the Arminianism of the Wesleys; then introduced “the half-way covenant;” and then developed into Unitarianism. Thus occurred a lamentable apostacy, which largely paralyzed our churches for half a century, and, in Massachusetts, threw them back upon a life and death struggle in behalf of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel; so that we lost our college at Cambridge, and in Boston, out of nine churches, only the “Old South” adhered to the faith. But for our free polity, which made it easy for the evangelical churches to cease fellowship with those unsound in the faith, and to improve their own statements and defence of the truth, we should have had a ruinous defection. But even those who retained evangelical views, and who embraced “the improvements in theology” which were introduced by Edwards and his immediate successors, were much hampered with a philosophy of religion which did not attract the masses sympathetically, or unite in its support the educated minds. And this thought prepares us for the next and kindred fact, to wit:

7. There was a prevailing lack of a true and influential method of preaching, such as is adapted to lay hold of the popular heart. Our ministers set their hearts upon

learning and orthodoxy. They insisted too rigidly upon a liberally educated ministry. They did not allow sufficiently for what God's Spirit could accomplish among plain people, by men of small culture but of warm piety and of large faith. They had on hand a very elaborate scheme of metaphysical divinity, and they were not quite agreed as to the best philosophy of certain abstruse points, and so had not a few theological battles to fight in their pulpits. These battles were carried on with the artillery of closely-written manuscripts. There came thus to be a dry style of sermonizing—logical, metaphysical, didactic—which could be accepted, even by the educated classes, only in a day when there was no current literature, and the people looked to the pulpit for their chief instruction and mental excitement, and in which the uneducated could take scarcely any interest. And then it was actually taught, by leading pastors and professors, that our mission as a denomination was to the upper classes, and that the masses we might wisely leave to be reached by other agencies—an error fatal to growth, and so contrary to the whole genius of the gospel, that it was almost equivalent to admitting that we were not the true ministers and churches of Jesus Christ! And while our clergy were thus philosophizing about religion, and keeping watch over orthodoxy, and reading written essays to drowsy audiences, warm-hearted, zealous, soul-saving Baptists and Methodists, who, with Christian wisdom, took it as their apostolic mission to reach and convert the masses, came in and stole away the ears and hearts of the people, overran a large part of New England itself, and swept victoriously through the new settlements—using no manuscripts, dealing in no metaphysics, laying stress principally upon a personal experience of saving faith in Christ, and of the power of the Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify the soul, and allowing a privilege of preaching as broad as the language of Holy Writ: "Let him that heareth say come!" And the people came, by tens and hundreds of

thousands! Lest this statement should be called in question, let us fortify it by a quotation from *Clark's History of the Congregational Churches of Massachusetts*, p. 226: "There was evidently an aptitude in the public mind to receive the Methodist faith and form of worship. Nor is it difficult to show how this came about. Old orthodoxy, tintured with Arminianism and cooled down to a luke-warm temperature in its delivery from the desk, had become the characteristic of Sabbath-day instructions, in many of the pulpits, as it had been prior to the Great Awakening in 1740; and nothing could have been more favorable to the success of an earnest, loud-spoken Methodist ministry. In his doctrinal teachings Jesse Lee, the pioneer of that denomination in these parts, suited such as were of Arminian tendencies. In his fervid style of address he was acceptable to many warm-hearted Calvinists tired of dull preaching. What with both these adaptations to the wants of the people, no wonder that Methodism had a rapid growth. Something of the kind was inevitable."

8. Mention might be made of still other hindrances to our denominational growth, to only one of which we will allude, namely, the misfortune of a partial connection with the State, for many years, in New England, and of an identification, in the popular mind, with the old Federalists, which gave the poorer class of people the idea that Congregationalism was a starched and aristocratic affair, and not in harmony with democratic ideas and plans. Thus Prof. J. L. Diman, in his able article in the January *North American Review* of the present year, reviewing "Religion in America" for the last century, remarks: "This illustration of the social position of the New England clergyman is not simply a curious picture of the manners of the period, but furnishes an important clew to some of the religious changes afterward witnessed. The clergy formed an extremely aristocratic class, and it was hardly less their social eminence than their specula-

tive teachings, which ultimately arrayed against them a portion of the population." Again he remarks: "The Baptists not only gained a controlling influence with a devout but humble class, who had little appetite for the elaborate discussions of the Congregational divines, but they were powerfully helped by the prejudice which exists, in every community, against the exclusiveness of superior culture. The rapid growth of the Baptists was, in large part, a democratic protest." Again: "The proclivity of the Congregational clergy for political discussion, so conspicuous in the period preceding the Revolution, was hardly less marked during the stormy times that preluded the memorable 'Civil Revolution of Eighteen Hundred.' Almost to a man the Congregational clergy of New England were on the Federal side. The biographer of Mr. Jefferson complains with bitterness that the ministers were all for Hamilton. As an inevitable result the Democratic triumph swept from the New England parishes all whose sympathies were pledged to the victorious faction, and considerable numerical strength, if not much piety, was carried over to rival congregations." Similarly Mr. Buck, in his *Massachusetts Ecclesiastical Law*, says: "It hardly needs to be said that the stringent parish laws of Massachusetts were promoting dissent and weakening Congregationalists. Instances are given, in Essex County, of Congregationalists forming Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist societies, merely to avoid the tax-laws." And to this we may add that when, in the final efforts to disengage the State from its original connection with the Congregational churches, and to bring all denominations upon a legal level, our ministers and churches offered an unwise resistance, the effect was to array against them not only all the sects but all whose sympathies for any reason went in favor of divorcing religion from the State. But we need not linger on further details. Plainly our fathers missed, in some respects, their golden opportunity.

To leave the matter here, however, were to do them and ourselves the rankest injustice. After facing the unwelcome facts already named, and ingenuously receiving the lessons of humility which they teach, it is still our privilege to find occasion of pride in the influence upon our country, during the century just closed, of the faith and polity of the Pilgrims; for increase of numbers is not the only test and measure of moral power. There was something of genuine significance, as well as of pride, when, in the old Latin fable, the lioness was taunted with bearing but a single cub, and replied, "*Unum sed leonem!*" The question of pre-eminence between a lion and a rabbit could hardly be settled by the comparative size of their families at the end of fifty years. Though the rabbit should come out far ahead in the returns of a census, he would hardly be able to crowd aside the king of beasts! Ecclesiastical systems must be judged by the institutions to which they give birth, by the men they produce, by the characters they form, by the moulding influence exerted over those outside of their pale. What, then, may be claimed for our Congregationalism, in its faith and in its polity, from this point of view? In considering the influence of the *Pilgrim faith*, we are not to inquire merely after the prevalence of Calvinism; although that was no doubt a power on character, and though it makes a most respectable numerical show, where one sums up the statistics of the Calvinistic bodies. But their views in this respect being shared by other denominations, were no peculiarity. What was characteristic in the Pilgrims was not the creed, but *the manner in which they held it*—as being simply the expression of the truth thus far ascertained by the study of God's word, and subject to modification at any time when new light should be received from the same quarter. Thus their leading virtue, as part of loyalty to the truth, was the maintenance of free investigation on every subject. This they inherited from their pastor, John Robinson, of whose parting address,

before they sailed, Winslow, who was present, says, in his *Narrative*: "He charged us, before God and His blessed angels, to follow him no further than he followed Christ; and if God should reveal anything to us by any other instrument of His, to be as ready to receive it as ever we were to receive any truth by his ministry; for he was very confident that the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy word. He took occasion, also, miserably to bewail the state and condition of the reformed churches, who were come to a period in religion, and would go no further than the instruments of their reformation. As, for example, the Lutherans, they could not be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; for whatever part of God's will he had further imparted and revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it. And so, also, saith he, you see the Calvinists, they stick where he left them—a misery much to be lamented; for though they were precious shining lights in their times, yet God hath not revealed His whole will to them; and were they now living, saith he, they would be as ready and willing to embrace further light as that they had received. Here also he put us in mind of our church-covenant, at least that part of it whereby we promise and covenant with God and with one another, to receive whatsoever light or truth shall be made known to us from His written word" It was in strict accord with this advice, that the original church at Plymouth covenanted "to walk in a church state in all God's ways made known or to be made known to them." And when the Westminster Assembly's Confession of Faith was received, the Cambridge Synod of the Massachusetts churches said, that they did "freely and fully consent thereunto for the substance thereof." And the result has been that, in the examination of ministers, on occasion of ordination or installation, we never have imposed any formal confession, but have allowed each person to present his views, orally or in writing, in his own way. The same practice long

prevailed, in the New England churches, in the reception of the members to the local church. Consequently there has been a steady tendency to theological progress. The elder President Edwards was accounted in his day a great innovator, or "new light," and his son, the younger President, enumerates ten marked "Improvements in Theology," to be attributed to his father's influence; while Dr. Finley could only explain his premature lamented death, in his 55th year, by saying: "He was pouring in a flood of light upon mankind, which their eyes, as yet, were unable to bear." Though he died eighteen years before our national birthday, his spirit soon characterized our whole ministry, and developed that modified Calvinism which is known as "New England theology," and which differs exegetically and philosophically from the older form. This has powerfully influenced the views of several other denominations. The Baptists, who were High Calvinists, at first, came under its modifying power through its effect on Andrew Fuller, their leading theologian. The Low Church Episcopalians accepted its conclusions through Thomas Scott, the commentator. But very marked has been its reception among the Presbyterians, at least one-half of whom, on the subjects of imputation, ability, and the extent of the atonement, agree with the Congregational view. This has come about not only by reason of the large transfer of Congregational ministers and members to that body, but also from the wide circulation of the writings of a succession of eminent theologians of marked originality and power; such as the two Edwardses, Bellamy, Hopkins, Emmons, Dwight, Taylor, Finney, and Bushnell; by no one of whom do we swear, and each of whom we are free to criticise, and yet by whom a needed and important work was done. And it is most significant, that no other denomination in America has produced such a brilliant array of fresh and influential thinkers, or can point, indeed, to a single theologian universally recognized as eminent for originality and suggestiveness. Theologically, New

England, with its Congregational freedom of thought, has been the brain of America; and if religion had been only brain-work, we should have led all the denominations in number. It were well to realize that it is far more.

It may easily be imagined that, as the Pilgrim faith was thus intelligently progressive, it inspired efforts to promote education. It aimed at a learned ministry, and at a generally intelligent laity, who, according to the apostolic injunction, should "be ready always to give an answer to every man who asked them a reason of the hope that was in them." Under this prompting, Congregational New England established common schools, which have now spread into nearly every State of the Union, and have become a characteristic American institution. In addition to these, the same influence secured academies in all the larger towns, to teach the higher branches of English learning and the preparatory Latin and Greek classics; and from this example the land has derived its vast network of academies and high schools. Above these were placed the colleges, the two oldest of which in the country, and the most celebrated, Harvard and Yale, were established by the Congregationalists. These were followed, just before and just after the Revolution, by Dartmouth, Bowdoin, Williams, Middlebury, and later, by Amherst, under the same auspices, to whose halls went the young men of all denominations and from all parts of the land. And thus came into adoption the American college-system, which has brought a liberal education within the reach of every earnest student. Still pressing on, in the pursuit of religious truth, our Congregational fathers set a noble example to other Christian bodies, by establishing the first Theological Seminary, at the beginning of the second third of our national century, at Andover Mass.—a step which has since been imitated by all other denominations, even by those which for many years were accustomed to denounce an educated ministry as "man-made." And, before passing from educational appliances, it may be not

amiss to note, that among us, also, was the first weekly religious newspaper started, the "*Boston Recorder*," now merged in "*The Congregationalist*," and that in this department our churches have ever kept the lead, even the ablest and most widely circulated undenominational religious papers being under Congregational editorship.

The influence of the Pilgrim spirit is also manifest in the prominence of our churches in the cause of missions, at home and abroad, and in connection with all benevolent effort. We learn from Bradford's *History of the Plymouth Plantation*, that among the reasons assigned by the Pilgrims for leaving Holland and emigrating to America was this: "A great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundation, or, at least, to make some way thereunto, for propagating and advancing the Gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world; yea, though they should be but stepping-stones unto others for the performing so great a work!" And when their pastor, John Robinson, who remained with a part of the Church in Holland, heard that, in self-defence, they had been compelled to slay two Indian chiefs, who were engaged in a conspiracy to murder the colonists, he wrote from out of a Christian heart: "Oh, how happy a thing had it been, that you had converted some before you had killed any!" This spirit led to numerous successful efforts to Christianize the surrounding Indians, by translating the Bible into their language, and planting churches and schools among them. The feeling, just after the Revolution, may be learned from the fact that, in 1788, the General Association of Connecticut formed themselves into a Missionary Society, with a constitution which said: "The object of this Society shall be to Christianize the heathen in North America, and to support and promote Christian knowledge in the new settlements within the United States." When the Spirit of God moved upon American piety to undertake missions for the heathen world at large, the new step was taken by

the Congregational churches, "in advance of all others," the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions being organized by them in 1810, with which the Presbyterians soon consented to co-operate, as did also the Reformed Dutch. This bold movement gave an impetus to the foreign missionary cause in all the other religious bodies of our country, and in time they also entered upon the work. But our churches, though comparatively few in number, have kept the lead, both relatively and absolutely. The contributions for this cause for the last year are thus reported: Episcopalians, \$98,000; Methodists, \$386,000; Baptists, \$397,000; Presbyterians, \$412,000; and Congregationalists, \$476,000. As the famous Romish apologist, Milner, in his "*End of Controversy*," refers to missions as one of the signs of the true Church, our claim to that designation would appear to have good evidence of validity.

A similar leadership appears in the founding of other religious societies. The American Tract Society began in New England; the American Sunday School Union was planned in New Haven, Conn.; while the American Seaman's Friends' Society had derivation from the same source.

Another influence, which is coming to great power in the Christian world, has gone forth from the Pilgrim churches; we refer to the promotion of Christian union. The Pilgrims were, indeed, not only Protestants, as against Romish usurpation, but also Separatists, as against the corruptions and enforced uniformity of the Church of England. Nevertheless, they insisted on the fellowship of true saints, whatever might be their church relations. Thus, Winslow, in his *Narrative*, asserts that, in the parting address already referred to, John Robinson "advised us, by all means, to endeavor to close with the godly party of the kingdom of England, and rather to study union than division, viz., how near we might possibly without sin close with them, than in the least measure to affect

division or separation from them." The terms of admission to the Church were made such as to favor the reception of all true Christians, so that Cotton Mather says, in his *Ratio Disciplina* (Intro. § 4,) "The Churches of New England make only vital piety the terms of communion among them; and they all with delight see godly Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Antipedobaptists, and Lutherans, all members of the same churches, and sitting together without offence in the same holy mountain, at the same holy table." So also the Independents of the Westminster Assembly declared: "We took measure of no man's holiness by his opinions, whether concurring with us or adverse from us;" and Herle insisted, that to require other churches to agree with our views, as a condition of communion, was "setting the sun by the dial!" Hence the readiness with which our fathers united with the Presbyterians, in ecclesiastical affairs, as well as in missionary efforts at home and abroad. Hence the prominent part which we have borne, in organizing all the union benevolent societies, and the undue proportion of the funds which we have contributed to their support. Hence the difficulty of creating any sectarian feeling among our ministers and members, which should introduce a high church or exclusive element. And while this broad communion with visible saints has been our principle of faith and action, our free polity has enabled us to set an example before all denominations of the ease with which ministers and churches of evangelical sentiments could come into relations of ecclesiastical fellowship and coöperation, notwithstanding minor differences of doctrine and worship. This example of liberality will gradually act as a contagion of good, and lead other bodies of Christians to occupy a similar position. Even the close-communion Baptists feel the influence of our example and of the spirit of our common faith and polity, and are becoming restive under a restraint which keeps them apart from their brethren. And when each denomination shall thus have gone to a

reasonable extent of liberality within its own organization, the separating walls will be little more than paper, and Christian Union will be a reality. And to such an end conduces our happy experience of continued denominational union, notwithstanding the theological and reformatory differences which have agitated us, and which have rent some other bodies with sore schisms. We have led them to suspect that which we know to be true, to wit, that the exercise of ecclesiastical power, more than any other one thing, is the occasion of strife and division in the Church of God.

As to the influence of the characteristic *Pilgrim polity* during the century just closed, something more should be said than that the Congregational ratio of increase has not been as great as that of other polities. Good as well as evil has resulted from the liberal, undenominational tendencies of our ministers and members. They have carried into other denominations a leaven of our principles, which has operated to produce marked changes of spirit and method. Hence, on all sides, the rigid ecclesiastics are complaining that their respective organizations are being "Congregationalized;" which means, in general, that differing theological views are held with more charity; that the merely clerical influence is declining; that the people are more and more claiming a participation in the decision of all questions; and that the exercise of ecclesiastical power is being supplanted by the moral influence of argument and advice. Any one who will compare American Episcopalianism with the English Established Church, will see the modifications to which Episcopacy was forced to submit, after the Revolution, in order to gain a hold upon a people imbued with the democratic ideas of Congregationalism. And so the Methodist Episcopal Church has been gradually falling under the same influence, and elevating the intellectual character of her ministers, lengthening their terms of pastoral service, consulting the people as to the appointments of the preachers,

and admitting the laity to a participation in the government. Our Presbyterian brethren, along with our members and ministers, have received so much of the Congregational spirit, that some of their leaders fear they have too eagerly drawn the Grecian horse within the walls of Troy! They have been compelled to allow of brief-term elderships, to consult the people carefully on each local or general project, to liberalize doctrinal tests of ministerial standing, so as equally to recognize New and Old School divinity, and to consult anxiously how to prevent appeals from reaching the General Assembly, (notwithstanding their theory of only one *church* for the whole land, with local congregations,) and how to bring that cumbersome body within a suitable limitation of numbers and work! In the *History of the New School*, by Rev. S. J. Baird, D. D., (an Old School man,) Chapter XXI is entitled "The System of Congregationalizing Agencies," and in the prefixed topics of the chapter the first is, "All our trouble came from Congregationalism;" which sad fact is duly set forth in the subsequent pages. Now that their reunion, after the long schism is, from the size of the denomination, developing the inherent difficulties of their judicial system, by which any local quarrel is liable to be carried up to the vast General Assembly for final review and decision, it is quite possible that the whole body may do what the semi-Congregationalized New School portion did for awhile just after the schism, viz: stop all appeals at the Synods, and make the General Assembly triennial instead of annual. Our principles have thus become a salt which has seasoned, with a democratic flavor, even the most centralized ecclesiastical corporations.

Nor, in considering the influence of the Pilgrim polity, must one overlook its manifest influence in favor of civil liberty and reformatory progress. Not without historic and logical reason has it been said that, in the civil compact drawn up and signed in the cabin of the *May Flower*, just before the pilgrim church landed, was the germ of

our American political institutions. It is also to be remembered, that the town meeting in New England, which De Tocqueville thinks was the formative influence in shaping our civil Democracy, was but the copy of the church meeting, the same men for a long time assembling in the same spirit in each capacity; and that it is on record that Thomas Jefferson, prior to the revolution, studied this ecclesiastical polity, as seen in a Baptist church, with direct reference to its political bearing on the future history of the country. And so, when the Revolution came, the Congregational ministers were one and all its promoters, in and out of the pulpit, in and out of the army; while the Prelatists went for royalty, their clergy fled the country, and their churches were without service. The way had been prepared for republicanism by the pulpit teaching and the church training of New England. Thus the reviewer in the *North American Review* for April, 1876, of Dr. Palfrey's fourth volume of the *History of New England*, speaking of the preliminary struggles with the royal governors, says: "There are, indeed, few more curious spectacles in the history of constitutional government than this of the people of Massachusetts, with no authoritative leader, with neither wealth nor social position, with very defective education, and with no clearly defined fundamental principles of government which they dared avow, carrying on a long, arduous, and successful constitutional struggle against the influence of the crown, and establishing precedents of which no one else in the whole world then understood the value. . . These village Hampdens, who came up to Boston, year after year, and voted solidly to disobey the royal orders, were the offsprings of town meetings and the puritan church-system." And how almost exclusively Congregational was this influence in New England, may be learned from the fact that, when the Declaration of Independence was made, in 1776, the churches of all denominations in Massachusetts were designated as follows: Episcopal, 11; Baptist, 16; Quaker, 18;

Congregational, 306. It also appears that, in 1760, when the whole population of New England was considered to be in round numbers, 500,000, the Congregationalists were estimated by President Stiles to number 440,000, or seven times as many as all other denominations together. Plainly they made the public spirit of the times.

It may then be supposed that, when the national liberty had been secured, these Congregationalists would still be foremost in behalf of all that pertained to human freedom and progress. And so it has been. Dr. Hopkins, at Newport, R. I., thundering from the pulpit and through the press against slavery and the slave trade, for twenty years or more previous to, during, and just after the Revolution, was a typical Congregational minister. Newport was then the center of the commercial interests involved in the African slave trade, and the hearers of Dr. Hopkins were deeply involved in the guilt. John Whittier has truly said, that "it may well be doubted whether, on that Sabbath day, the angels of God, in their wide survey of His universe, looked upon a nobler spectacle than that of the minister of Newport rising up before his slave-holding congregation and demanding, in the name of the Highest, the 'deliverance of the captive, and the opening of the prison doors to them that were bound.' " Similar was the spirit of the younger Edwards, who did the same, at New Haven, Ct., ten years later. And when the modern agitation against slavery began, Congregational New England became its headquarters and inspiration, and our system revealed peculiar facilities for carrying forward the reform ecclesiastically. Each church could act for itself in withdrawing fellowship from the iniquity, and needed not to await the action, neither was likely to be overawed by the influence, of superior church judicatories. This fact opened the eyes of many ministers and churches that had joined Presbytery, and led them, by retracing their steps, to regain liberty in two respects. At the West, particularly, the Congrega-

tional Churches were a unit in demanding the overthrow of the accursed system, and as they then patiently endured the shame, so they may now wear the glory. Were there time for the recital, the facts would be found to be parallel in connection with the temperance reform, which, in its early stages, owed more to such Congregational ministers as Lyman Beecher, Justin Edwards, and Nathaniel Hewitt, and to the endorsement of the New England District and State Associations, than to any other human cause. The same may be said of the Peace Cause, and of nearly every other genuine reform.

In looking to the future and endeavoring to anticipate the denominational outcome of another century of the national history, we think that the experience of the past warrants the indulgence of bright hopes. The latter part of the century just closed witnessed a marked improvement in our growth. This could not so well be exhibited in the older communities, where the influence of the limitations mentioned was great, and where our new denominational policy, of life instead of suicide, had little opportunity to go into force with social and ecclesiastical powers already organized against us, and sure to seize and appropriate our members moving from other localities. The Western States must be our reliance for showing an ability to grow, and to do our proper proportion of Christian work. Let us then glance at the changes in this section in the interval between the issuing of the first *Congregational Year Book*, in 1854, and of the statistics given in the January *Quarterly* of 1876. In Ohio we had then unconnected with Presbytery but 124 churches; now, 211. In Indiana only 7, of which definite knowledge could be had; now, 26. In Illinois, 115; now, 242. In Michigan, 93; now, 200. In Wisconsin, 114; now, 195. In Iowa, 57; now, 229. In Minnesota, 2; now, 94. In Missouri, where slavery before the war almost entirely excluded us, 1; now, 70. In the region west of Missouri to the Pacific Ocean, 7; now, 186. In all the West we had then 420 churches, and have now

1473, being a gain in 22 years of about 329 per cent., although, east of the Mississippi, the ground had been so largely preoccupied by a kindred denomination. It would be unjust, also, to our future prospects not to notice that, even with the drawbacks named, our *polity*, simply as such, and separate from our name and fellowship, has been adopted by a larger proportion of the Protestant Christians of the land than has any other, and has thus proved its adaptedness to church work in the most varied relations. There are at this time about 70,000 Protestant Churches. Of these the strict Prelatic polity has about 2,800, or 4 per cent.; the modified Episcopacy of the Methodists, about 20,000, or 28½ per cent.; the Presbyterian polity (including Reformed and Lutheran bodies) about 12,000, or 17 per cent.; and the Congregational (including Baptists of all kinds, Unitarians, Universalists) about 37,000, or nearly 53 per cent. It may thus appear that while our denominational *name* stands less prominent in the Census returns than that of several others, our denominational *principles* have vindicated themselves nobly and triumphantly. Our present circumstances are hopeful, moreover, because these our principles are better known and appreciated, and our methods are more nearly perfected. We understand our mission with a wiser intelligence, and we find it accepted in no small degree by others. Congregationalism means liberty, order, and fellowship; evangelical orthodoxy and moral purity; investigation, education and progress of thought; flexibility of methods and a point of union for Christians who differ in unessentials. These ideas are not only to be held, but to be propagated. Derived, as we believe, from the New Testament, they are adapted to all lands and races, and tend to gain for themselves universal acceptance, as Christian character ripens and Christian experience broadens. Our members, learning their providential mission, have developed our system of benevolent effort and of ecclesiastical fellowship, so that it is now fitted for continental results, as formerly it was not

even for provincial action. We support and control our own religious organizations for the preaching of the gospel, the planting of churches, and the erection of sanctuaries, on the home and foreign missionary field, while our National Council keeps alive a sense of unity, manifests our fellowship, and enables us to lay plans with wise consultation for the promotion of general interests.

Having thus a well-developed system of church-fellowship, adapted to the widest territorial expansion, having theological views thoroughly evangelical, having a denominational life historically rooted in that which is most characteristic and most heroic in our country's record, having an organism which carries with it no narrow sectarianism, but is instinct with liberty and progress, and tends ever to union, and having learned wisdom from both the failures and the successes of the period just closed, the Congregational Churches enter upon the second century of the nation with exalted hopes for it and for themselves, believing that in the Pilgrim Faith and Polity will be found a prophecy of those forms of the Church and of the State which, in the golden age of the future, shall prevail throughout the earth.

TO THE READER!

The foregoing article from the "*New Englander*"—written by Rev. Wm. W. Patton, D. D., at the time a resident of Chicago, Ill., but now the President of Howard University, Washington, D. C.—is republished by a Congregational layman, and a copy is sent to every minister in the denomination, with certain practical ends in view. He has long lamented the lack of interest, on the part of many Congregationalists, in the perpetuation of the faith and polity of the Pilgrim Fathers, as indicated by the ease with which our ministers and laymen are drawn into other denominations, and by the approval given to such a step by those in positions of influence. He has seen evidence, that even Congregational ministers are not as well acquainted with the history of the churches as is desirable, and that there is a general want of information as to the causes of their limited number as compared with several other denominations once inferior. Had the pastors, a hundred years ago, taught their members, beginning with the children, the Scriptural and rational foundation of Congregationalism; had our theological seminaries from the first similarly indoctrinated their students; had the ministers and members who emigrated to new regions been true to this part of the faith; and had our methods of cultivating and expressing ecclesiastical fellowship not been restricted in those days to limited localities, we should not have fallen from the first to the seventh place, in the list of religious denominations. But it is not too late to learn from experience, and it is hoped, that the wide circulation of this pamphlet may aid to strengthen the now increasing tendency to coöperation and unity, in our benevolent operations and ecclesiastical arrangements.

3 2044 058 15

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred by retaining it beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.

~~DUE~~ ~~00113~~ ~~1938~~
WIDENER

JUL 6 2 2004

FEB 10 2002

CANCELLED

BOOK DUE

